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The educational picture of the Mexican American is seriously impaired by the lack of Mexican Americans in schools of higher education. The high school graduate has had his cultural values and language assailed by the dominant Anglo culture. Psychologically scarred, he is faced with other impediments to personal and educational achievement. He is confronted with weak counseling programs, inadequate study habits, culture and value conflict, lack of adequate guidance and encouragement, the isolation encountered in the educational environment, and partial rejection by his parental group, peer group, and community. The Mexican American student in higher education needs intensified counseling to ease personal conflicts and to overcome a fear of the new learning experience. He also needs guidance and direction in the transition from family orientation to self orientation. Several statistics are included. (CM)

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THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN AND HIGHER EDUCATION

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There is no doubt in the minds of those who have studied the educational picture of the Mexican-American that the most serious obstacle to improvement of a distressing situation is the lack of Mexican-Americans in schools of higher education. Dr. Tom Carter of the University of Texas at El Paso reports that in the total enrollment of the University of Texas in 1966-67, only 771 or 2.8 percent of the students were of Spanish surname. Dr. Octavio Romano of the University of California at Berkely points out that during the same year there were only 60 Mexican-Americans on that campus out of an enrollment of 27,000. He also reveals that only between 500 and 700 Mexican-Americans graduated at all California state supported colleges in 1966 out of a base population of over 300,000 college kids.

The immediate response to these statistics is that they must be in the junior colleges and we'll soon see them on college campuses. A California study of their junior colleges during the fall of 1966 shows that in the "graded classes" 7.42 percent of the enrollment was of Spanish surname. The facts are quite clear that a large number of Mexican-Americans do not graduate from high school and a sizable number of those who do graduate do not go on to any form of higher education. A reliable estimate is that in parts of Texas 70 percent of the Mexican-Americans will drop out between first grade and high school graduation; and in some of the schools in the urban centers of California the dropout rate in the high school is 40 to 50 percent there leaves little potential for college.

What are the factors that cause the Mexican-American to terminate his schooling with high school graduation or before? What does the Mexican-American who goes on to college face?

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The Mexican-American who survives the public school path has experienced some painful personal situations. He has had his cultural values and personal worth assailed. And one of the main attacks has been on his language. This may be true despite the fact that he did not experience severe difficulty in learning English--and may have started school with as good a command of English as his Anglo fellow students. But he learned quickly that there is a division of the community into contrasts, English-speaking and Spanish-speaking, each with a lack of understanding of each other--with the ensuing hostility this lack of understanding engenders. This language complexity will be one of the most important cultural conflicts he experiences. And it only reinforces his awareness that he is caught between his parental group and the rest of the community--and is, in part, rejected by both.

Dr. Manuel Ramirez of Rice University points out that the bilingual-bicultural individual faces so much frustration in having to make choices so often, and under difficult conditions, that he usually attempts to resolve the conflict by choosing one group and rejecting the other. He may choose to become a rebel--dissociating himself from his culture, or he may join the in-group and become overtly hostile to the symbols of the majority culture. Whatever course he chooses, he leaves high school with some deep psychological scars.

Not only does he bear the marks of treading through cultural conflicts and making choices which leave him open to constant attack, but he has also had to work his way through a school system that gears its educational program to meet the needs of the Anglo middle-class society. He has had to endure a school environment which, if not hostile to him, certainly does little to recognize and aid him in the intense struggle he is going through to make his educational experiences meaningful. And, tragically, one of the weakest

elements for the Mexican-American in this middle-class school environment is the counseling program. Very little attempt is made to relate his potential worth to a significant program designed to provide him with personal and educational goals. In fact, so very often this dual culture atmosphere, both in the school and outside, supplies him with basic personal and social satisfaction from one culture and intellectual attainment and socio-economic success from the other. It is not too difficult in such a bewildering atmosphere to "dropout."

If you add to this almost overwhelming situation the scarcity of money to help him through our "free" public schools; the intense peer pressure of those who have chosen to leave him; a frequent absence of strong parental participation in his educational activities and anxieties; then you can see the immense strength in the graduate.

But now he faces the ultimate in barriers to personal and educational achievement. Can he go to college and retain what is important to him as an individual--those remaining values he has carefully distilled from the bicultural society in which he has received his education so far. Will the new, intensified educational horizon completely strip him of any connection or identification with his formative culture? Can he afford to go to college, not only financially, but for a full utilization of this education. What will college do for him, his people, his personal worth to society? These are compelling questions for the Mexican-American college bound student.

Now a real dilemma develops. Where can he turn for advice? What has been the experience of other Mexican-Americans? During his school career he has encountered few. And most likely none in his counseling office and even fewer in administrative and policy making positions in school. Dr. Manuel Guerra of the University of Southern California highlights this sad situation

by pointing out that in California where the student population in the public schools is 14.3 percent Mexican-American, that there is no state operated teacher training institution that requires a potential counsellor to take Spanish language instruction or sociology of the Spanish-speaking community. He also points out that in one community of 100,000 Mexican-American citizens the college there has only one Mexican-American on the faculty, and only part time, with a total of 240 people on the staff. Dr. Guerra goes on to point out that in eighteen state colleges, over seventy junior colleges, twelve private colleges and universities, and in the nine university campuses--not a single college president of Mexican-American origin in California. The image of previous success, or of potential advice from those who have made it is barren indeed. This is the picture of the Mexican-American high school student in 1968.

How is the H.E.P. student different? He isn't. He has experienced the same frustrations of the student who may have stayed in school through graduation. True, he is a migrant. But his needs and his desires are the same. He does need, however, some additional attention in some specific areas. The first is study habits. The fact that he has dropped out of school or has been away from the formal school environment for a number of years does point out this weakness. Considerable attention must be given to assisting him in developing a program of study routine. This will require some constant attention on the part of the professional staff during the first few months on the campus. There must be made clear that he has a personal responsibility to identify his school requirements and to plan the ways of meeting them. The important thing here is that this realization of need for an organized study program be consistent with his goals for achievement. This will make personal counseling a vital factor--and a new experience for him.

Probably the biggest area of personal adjustment for the H.E.P. student will be in formulating for himself a philosophy for coping with his freedom and its demands on him. In most cases, here-to-fore, his decisions have been based on the cultural demands of the family first. These may still be primary with some of the students--particularly those who will need to send some of their money home for family support. For those who don't the problem is how to wisely relate this new freedom of decision to personal goals. For those who are older or have been away the family atmosphere for some time, significant levels of self-reliance have been achieved. Now he needs to make himself a part of a different family--a belonging to a new group. This will pose very difficult decisions for him. While I stressed the need for scholastic counseling, the critical need for most of these youngsters is access to and constant attention to the stages of adjustment to a new life far removed from the cultural shelter of the enlarged family. The acquired self-reliance will be tested. Without good guidance and encouragement uncertainty will develop and unless eased will spell disaster to the successful completion of his participation in the program. The substitution of a respected person to whom he may rely will do much to help bridge the change from the Mexican-American oriented family consideration in any action to one where the direction of decision making is a personal and individual. The transistion from this way of life is most difficult. It demands the most careful participation by the leadership of the program.

One of the things I see as most important in making the H.E.P. a successful project is the development of means by which the students can have a participating role in all aspects of the college life. Without this emphasis, the feeling of isolation and rejection which many of these youngsters have already experienced will be revived. There is a multitude of areas where such

participation can be made. I'm talking about drama, music, literary projects, athletics, intra-campus activities, planning and carrying out of social events. If the academic program is to have worth to the youngster, he must feel that he is capable of being active in the total scope of the educational environment. And the Mexican-American has a greater need for this involvement than perhaps most of his Anglo or Negro friends. We talk a lot about the mainstream of American life, if the Mexican-American is going to get into this mainstream, and the H.E.P. project provides a great basis for this movement, it is absolutely imperative that this student sense a relationship between his role and his goals and what this means in association with the community he will function in. These suggested activities of involvement with the college programs will require a selling job, but it must and can be done.

Another area for prime consideration and attention is that of reducing the constant uncertainty many of these students will face on whether this program they have gone into is really what they should be doing--and more important, if so, why? One of the best ways to work on this problem is to make a conscious and constant effort to bring the students into close and if possible personal relationships with the Mexican-Americans in the community. Some of these relationships will, of course, develop naturally. But there needs to be some structured approach on a regular and meaningful basis to insure that the doubt of purpose and worth will be subdued. Such a program will not only help bolster the sagging belief in themselves, but will provide a most substantial base for continual community support for the program. If the Mexican-American community identifies with the goals of the H.E.P., it will make this recognition and acceptance a basis for focusing its energies for expansion and continuation of the program. This personal commitment by the community will give confidence to the students and will greatly enhance their determination for personal success.

In brief summary, the H.E.P. student needs intensified counseling. This counseling must be directed toward easing the personal conflicts he faces in this new environment where there is a challenge to him to abandon his cultural ties and to adopt a culture which has not in the past been supportive of his values. He must also be helped to overcome a fear of what this learning environment will do to him after his previous school experiences for the most part have left him ill-prepared. The other critical area is the need for guidance and direction in the transition from a concept of decision making based on family needs first to one in which his personal and individual needs may need to be met first.